



Invited

LENT 2021

Episode Five: Journey

Welcome to the final episode of season one of Invited. We conclude this season by putting everything we have learnt into the context of Easter and seeing where we can find evidence for all the things we have explored, amidst the Easter liturgies. Our guest speaker this week is Eleanor Oliver, who does a great job of introducing herself.

Guest Speaker – Eleanor Oliver

Hello, thank you to Lizzie and the whole Invited team for asking me to talk to you on this diocesan mission. I moved to A&B 15 years ago, to St Joseph's in Brighton, so hello to anyone watching in Brighton! I'm married to Matt, we have three young children, and a year and a half ago we moved up the train line to Haywards Heath where we were just about to get stuck into our new parish of St Paul's when lockdown hit. At the same time, in March, I founded something called '[Colour and Shape](#)' which has developed into an online community for families and all those who support them on the adventure of faith.

We have been on quite a journey over the last few weeks. In Week One David Wells invited us to reflect on God's gratuitous love for you, for me, for the whole of creation. A love that we have done nothing to earn, and that nothing can separate us from. Not even the sin that Fr Thomas spoke of Week Two, because as we see in Genesis, God embarks on a great rescue operation to bring back together what had been divided. Jesus lays down his life for us on the cross, taking on our sin, defeating darkness, so that we can meet the Light of the World as David Beresford explained in Week Three. And we who have heard the Good News are called to be light in the world, to as Father David put it, 'bring down a slice of heaven.'

We are not passive bystanders in God's work of redeeming creation, but called to participate in the mission, to follow Jesus as his disciples. There is so much there. These truths take a lifetime to explore. New layers of meaning being revealed to us all the time. The journey, the adventure, continues!

Because there is so much to discover, we are given the gift of the liturgical year. A cycle that takes us through the full mystery of waiting for a Messiah, the Incarnation, Jesus' Death

and resurrection, his ascension, pentecost, finishing with the triumphant return of Jesus Christ King of the Universe.

We go round this cycle each year, but it's not so much a circle, as a spiral. Imagine a 'slinky'. We are different each time we encounter a part of this mystery. We learn, we change, and we connect with God in a new way, as a new layer is revealed to us. But every analogy breaks down somewhere, and this spiral suggests that we learn and change at the same rate each year. I find that sometimes I'm rushing forward in my understanding, and sometimes just making small steps with one little piece of the puzzle falling into place.

I wonder how you have found the last four weeks? Have you rushed ahead? Has one thing fallen into place?

In this cycle of the liturgical year the feast of feasts, the liturgy of liturgies, the solemnities of solemnities is the Triduum, or the three days from Maundy Thursday night to Easter Sunday. All that we have been talking about over the last few weeks - this great love that conquers death and restores us to new life - is right there and we are invited in.

Every Sunday is a little Easter but once a year we get to do a deep dive and this most important of events is pulled out into real time. Even though we are given props of sorts and lines to say, this is not a passion play or a re-enactment of what happened 2000 years ago. I'm sure many of you watching are familiar with [Wintershall](#) near Guildford where they put on a play 'The Life of Christ' in the open air. As the audience you follow Jesus and the disciples around the estate, part of the crowd at the feeding of the 5000, watching the drama unfold. If you haven't been I really recommend it. But at Wintershall we are the audience. Not a congregation. In the liturgy of the Triduum we are a worshipping body entering into a mystery made present in the here and now. We are present as Jesus gives us his body, first in the upper room at the Last Supper, and then on the cross. The Eucharist infuses that love - that gratuitous love that conquers death - into us. The Eucharist is ordered to the cross, and the cross is ordered to the resurrection. It is the crucified and resurrected Christ that we consume in holy communion. You don't get that at a passion play!

Now, because each part of the Triduum makes sense in relation to the other parts, I really encourage you, if you don't already do this, to be present at each service. If you can't make it in person to your parish celebrations, there will be [livestreams available](#) to you, and although it's not quite the same as being in a darkened church, seeing the light of the paschal candle spread out around you and singing the Gloria with a full congregation, God wants to meet you wherever you are. Last year it was truly moving to be at home with our little family, washing each other's feet on Maundy Thursday, and lighting our own fire in the garden so we could process the light of Christ into our home.

We began this mission talking about love - and at the Last Supper on Thursday night Jesus shows his disciples how to love. "A new commandment I give to you. Love one another as I have loved you". Jesus, the leader, washes the feet of his disciples, modelling how to lead by serving. But not *just* serving. We have knowledge the disciples did not have. Love one another as I have loved you means something very different when you know what will

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happen the next day. That cuts me to the heart because it reveals to me how far I have to go. Saint Teresa of Calcutta once said "I have found the paradox, that if you love until it hurts, there can be no more hurt, only more love."

Suffering, hurt, pain - my instinct is to avoid them all. And I pray that they won't touch those I love. But we also instinctively know that sacrifice and love are deeply intertwined. I sacrifice my time, my energy, my sleep, my resources for my family, not out of duty and resentment, but because there walks a part of my heart outside my body. I love them, so I give myself for them. It's in our relationships that we get a glimpse of the heart of God. If I love my children this much, imagine how much more my heavenly Father loves me.

The second reading on Maundy Thursday is a passage from St Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, recounting Jesus' words at the Last Supper. The words will be so familiar to us, as they make up part of the Eucharistic prayer we hear at Mass - "This is my body...this is my blood...do this as a memorial of me." What we don't hear are the parts before and after this where St Paul is really telling off the Corinthians because they have lost sight of the true meaning of the Eucharist and have been breaking bread thoughtlessly and irreverently.

St Paul has no praise for the Corinthians, who are doing more harm than good by not giving the Eucharist the true reverence it demands. This is communion with God, the source and summit of the Christian life. It calls for our full, active, and conscious participation, and Paul commands that the community at Corinth examine themselves before they eat the bread and drink from the cup. Paul is calling me to do the same. How do I approach the Eucharist? With reverence, or in a state of division from those around me and from God? Jesus is the Paschal Lamb who was sacrificed - a new Passover - and in giving himself is both the victim and the High Priest doing the sacrificing. After this night there will be no more need for blood sacrifices on an altar. The cross does not look like an altar, but it is on Calvary that a brutal execution is transformed into a sacrificial offering and the source of our life.

A few years ago, around Easter, Tesco got into a lot of trouble with an advert that ran "Great offers on beer and cider. Good Friday just got better." They quickly apologised once they realised how far off the mark they had been, but they aren't the only ones. I'm pretty sure Brighton racecourse put a similar flyer through our door one year.

I'm not sure what amazes me more. The fact that not ONE person around that table thought - "maybe this isn't such a great idea", or that anyone could think that Good Friday could be improved on. The God who made me, loves me so much that he took on all my sin and the sin of everyone who ever lived, so that I could have eternal life! Not quite the same as beer and cider

Because we have the full picture and we know this ends with triumph and joy, we understand why it is called Good Friday, but that does not make it an easy celebration. We come face to face with the cross, with the division that Fr Thomas spoke about, and our part in that broken relationship. We have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God. This is why we stand in the congregation and shout with one voice "Crucify him." We cannot disconnect ourselves from the events of 2,000 years ago and place the blame purely on

those who were alive at the time. As I was growing up, I hated saying those words. It was much easier to be the servant girl at the fire, questioning and judging Peter as he denied Jesus. Surely if I had been around at the time, I would have stuck up for Jesus! If only Pilate had made a different decision. And on some level, I would go into each Good Friday hoping that maybe this year we'd pick Barabbas instead and Jesus wouldn't have to suffer such an excruciating death.

But we cannot escape the Cross. We must shout "Crucify him". We may not be the person who literally drove the nails into Jesus, but we wound the body of Christ in other ways. My sin is on Jesus' shoulders, and though we know the joyful end, this is the time to be sombre. To look at our reality and see what needs transforming. The great saints were not born perfect. They struggled with their own sins, but to again quote Mother Teresa - "Saints are sinners who keep trying." So we humbly come to the wood of the cross, we kneel in gratitude, we press into our pain, and we adore the one who bore our infirmities, endured our sufferings, was pierced for our offences.

This darkness is how we begin the Easter Vigil. We have felt the absence of God. Emptiness.

We imagine the disciples, hiding in fear. Scared. In the darkness of their own pain. But it is also our darkness, not just theirs. And then a light breaks through. The Paschal candle is lit and processed, and we are not left alone in the dark. Instead we hear proclaimed the great rescue mission, the history of our salvation, a God calling throughout the ages "Come back to me" first in the Exultet and then in the readings that follow. Beginning with Genesis we see that "The New Testament lies hidden in the Old and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church, 129*), and the connections are again made for us. Everything points to Jesus and God's promise that he will send a chosen one, his own Son, to heal the divide. Abraham offers his son as a sacrifice. Moses leads his people out of slavery. The sacrificial blood of the lamb at the passover rescues his people. Isaiah brings us to recollect the covenant of love after the flood - a rainbow that promises: this will never happen again in this way. "I will always be kind and merciful to you." We have a new Moses. A new Passover. A new Exodus, resulting in the new heavenly banquet in the presence of God. Jesus, God's own Son, has given us life, and we look around the church to see the light now being passed on, growing around us, consuming the darkness, and bringing joy and hope and peace.

In this light we remember that we are now sons and daughters of God. Baptised into his family - children of the light. We are an Easter people, and Alleluia is our song! And we are going to be singing it a lot now. As partners with God we are called to take that Alleluia to the streets, and transformed in Christ we should come down the mountain with urgency, with stronger faith, with infectious joy, propelled afresh to do the work of listening to and loving God and one another. Not as super humans who get everything right, but working in that field hospital that Fr Thomas mentioned in Week Two. Healing others through the power of Jesus working in us. Allowing ourselves to be healed. And with Good News to proclaim, that Jesus is risen - He is risen indeed!

So if you are expecting to be changed by entering fully into the liturgy of liturgies, I encourage you to take some time to reflect on where you are now, this side of Easter.

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Where has God spoken to you over the last few weeks? What has already changed for you in your understanding? And where do you need the light of Christ to shine powerfully in your life? Because "Behold - He is doing a new thing."

Personal Testimony – Simon South (Part II)

Thank you so much Simon, for coming back for part two. It's lovely to see you again and to be recording the second half of your testimony with you. And just for our viewers I'm going to do a quick reminder of the story so far, if that's okay.

So just to recap, you were searching for a long time for something to kind of fill the void that you were aware of in your life, and you were working really hard to get promotions and cars and nice homes and things to try and fill that hole, but realised that that wasn't doing it. After a bit of exploration you found your spiritual home, the Catholic Church, and you joined the RCIA program which stands for the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults. Is that right?

Simon: That's correct.

Interviewer: So tell us a little bit more about what that involves.

It was an absolutely wonderful and affirming experience actually. I was very lucky that our parish priest at the time had invited one of the long-standing members of the parish to come along and support, which was lovely. And that's how I met this wonderful lady called Ann, who's been with me right the way through my journey, even to the point of being my Godmother when I was received, so she's a wonderful lady. We used to meet every Saturday and we used to just explore different aspects of faith. It started off very much exploring what makes you happy. What is it in your life that genuinely makes you happy and obviously I was always able to explore all the things that didn't make me happy.

And I didn't quite understand or get the things that did make me happy. And gradually they sort of start coming through - you understand that it's your, your relationship with your family, with your wife. And it's the *non* things that make you happy, not the things, which sounds really crazy thing to say but, boy, did I take my time to learn this, I really did! So we met for about 12 - 14 weeks in total every Saturday. We'd sit there we'd spend some time exploring the different aspects of faith, whether it be spiritual, whether it be through scripture. I was introduced at that point to the whole essence of Lectio Divina. And we would spend 5/10 minutes every Saturday, just with a moment from the Gospel, understanding what it was saying to me.

And then we explored the whole essence of liturgy, of Mass, because I was starting with nothing. I had no background at all, so everything was a completely new discovery - I can relate very strongly to where the Lord says "come to me all little children", because after each session on Saturday I was I was racing home to see Lynn, my wife, and say "guess what we did today, guess what we did?", and it was so wonderful.

Looking back, it was just so wonderfully innocent and liberating and exciting and fulfilling and every piece that was added to the jigsaw just created another simple sense of working towards completion working towards fulfilment, it was a wonderful experience.

Interviewer: That makes me think of what Eleanor was talking about in her talk just now, about the 'slinky' - it just keeps building and building and building and building. There's a lot of people that have been brought up Catholic who will have gone through things like their first confession, when they were children, I guess I did mine when I was probably about seven and confessed very simple things I would imagine, I hope I wasn't a terrible, terrible child !

But for you, I guess that was a little challenging. How was that for you? What was that experience like? We don't have to know everything !

It is only a 30-minute program ! It was really daunting as the first time because going through the programme, spending time just sitting and reflecting and understanding and learning the Christian life. You can't help but look back and reliving those darker moments and those, those difficult times where I didn't behave in a Christian manner where I was selfish and I do remember going through quite a bit of a challenging three or four weeks before going to my confession, simply because I suddenly became truly aware of what I had been doing and that was an immensely awakening moment.

But I remember going along, and it was only a week or so before I was being received into the church for my first confession. And, I went into the confessional with Father Joseph, who's a very lovely, lovely, gentle Franciscan priest. And it became almost just like a conversation like we're sharing now and, and he was so affirming and so supportive and I couldn't help myself but just share everything that I'd been carrying as a burden and a weigh and as pain for the last 40 odd years.

Coming out of that confessional I genuinely felt about 10 feet tall. and I must have felt about 5 or 6 stone lighter. It was the most amazing experience coming out of that confessional I think I've experienced in most of my adult life. And it is something I feel so passionate about, I still try to attend, at least on a monthly basis, simply because Christ is there offering us His forgiveness, he's there offering us hope and he's there to say let me take that burden from you.

Interviewer: And you've answered the question, which was can you expand on why that is?

The Lord says, you know, "come with me because my burden is light and my yoke is easy" and for me that's captured in the whole essence of reconciliation. If we've got something wrong with us physically we very quickly and very happily go along to the doctor. But do we take as much care and as much attention and as much reverence for our soul. This is such a golden wonderful blessing and gift from God.

Interviewer: Absolutely, Absolutely. 100% agree. So this is about a week before you were received into the church. And you were received into the church at the Easter Vigil, presumably so tell us a little bit about that Triduum, Holy Thursday Good Friday and then the, the Easter Saturday, what was that like for you.

Well, it's an absolutely amazing experience, I've used the word couple of times because I struggle with finding a better description really. As we got towards the end of the RCIA programme and then I attended my first confession, reconciliation I just had this absolute overwhelming need, this desire, this drive. I didn't just *want* to receive the Eucharist I truly felt in my heart. I *had* to receive the Eucharist and it became so all compelling it really did.

And as we went through Maundy Thursday and the washing of the feet and I remember thinking that I can't understand it in a lot of ways, why Christ is still calling me to join his church because I've not done anything like this; I've not thought of other people

So I started to have some questions and some doubts but still the most overwhelming feeling was, I had to receive the Blessed Sacrament - I had to join with Christ.

And then Good Friday, I think I truly understood the whole essence of the sacrifice for the first time, of what Christ has done for all of us. And, again that whole essence of how much must He love us to do that for us? It's just, it's beyond words, it really is beyond words.

So as we then moved into Easter Sunday and being received, that first time that I held the Lord in my hand was absolutely immense, I felt honoured and I felt so humble. I felt scared. I think every emotion was going through me at that point. I remember as I held it ... in my hand, my hands were shaking because I was so excited, and nervous about receiving Christ into my life.

And afterwards I just felt so truly elated, starting to feel complete. I was sharing with you that sense of a hole, and the missing and I was genuinely starting to feel that I belonged where I was, I belonged in the Church, I belonged with the parishioners, I belonged there with Christ.

And I don't think I've ever felt that sense of belonging. Ever. And that sense, over the last 12 years has just got stronger and stronger and stronger.

Interviewer: Oh, that's beautiful. That's beautiful. So that was your first Triduum and it was quite significant for you, Simon. Do you find that every year, as Eleanor was saying about the spiral that we go on of the Church's liturgical year, do you find every Easter is a new Easter for you. And what have you found your experience to be since that time that maybe others could take from for their experience this year?

Yeah, absolutely. I guess that wonderful example that Eleanor shared with us about the slinky and the sort of coming together and the falling apart, and sort of the ebbs and flows of life are actually mirrored in faith, and each Easter Triduum. There's a different message coming through from all of us so you've got the service aspect, and the humility aspects of Maundy Thursday; you've got that love and that sacrifice and that willingness to be for other people, not be for yourself - that is Good Friday. And then we have the whole vigil on Saturday, and the new light and the waiting and the seeking and trying to find in your inner heart, where Christ is within you. And then you have the glory of the rising, it's such an immense and emotional journey for us to really immerse ourselves in.

And I think what this whole essence of immersion. Apologies to St Bernard of Clairvaux, because I'm going to paraphrase him rather which is probably not the best thing to do with a saint! But one of the things I read, he describes our faith as a reservoir. And the reservoir filled with water and filled with water and filled with water.

But it can't share that water with people until it is full, and then it overflows. And it's the overflowing which is the, the outpouring of Christ's love and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

And the Triduum fills your reservoir, it fills your heart. And that's what gives us the ability to share our faith, to share Christ's love, it's such a beautiful, beautiful thing.

Interviewer: So your advice would be to make sure you attend all three services and not just kind of pick a highlight. I know a lot of people just like Good Friday, don't they, why?

Well, life is about the journey, the ups and downs and the Triduum is about the ups and downs, it's covers every aspect, so there may be a specific aspect of that feast that talks to you personally but it's the complete journey, which is our life.

So, immerse yourself.

Father Thomas gave us the expression of bathing in the beauty of God , and the Triduum with all its ups and downs with all its emotional journey is us, bathing in Christs life and Christs journey.

Prayer



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Loving, ever-living God, your Son Jesus, our Saviour, was obedient even to accepting death on the Cross and, through his Passion, brought about our reconciliation with you.

May we follow his example of humility, patient suffering and love and so share with him in his Resurrection.

Who is Lord for ever and ever.

Amen.

Reflection Questions

Do you believe that God wants to meet you wherever you are?

How/where/when do you or could you meet with God?

How do you experience this...in nature...in silence...in scripture...in people? Do you make time to do this?

Do you get 'a glimpse of the heart of God' in any of your relationships?

How could you give others 'a glimpse of the heart of God' in Holy Week?

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Do you believe that God will always be kind and merciful to you? When have you experienced this?

What is an area of fear, emptiness or darkness in your life? What could you do to change this? Who or what could help you?

Conversation

The Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ according to Mark

First thing in the morning, the chief priests together with the elders and scribes – in short, the whole Sanhedrin – had their plan ready. They had Jesus bound and took him away and handed him over to Pilate. Pilate questioned him “Are you the king of the Jews?” He answered, “It is you who say it”. And the chief priests brought many accusations against him. Pilate questioned him again: “Have you no reply at all? See how many accusations they are bringing against you!”. But, to Pilate’s amazement, Jesus made no further reply. At festival time Pilate used to release a prisoner for them, anyone they asked for. Now a man called Barabbas was then in prison with the rioters who had committed murder during the uprising. When the crowd went up and began to ask Pilate the customary favour, Pilate answered them “Do you want me to release for you the king of the Jews?” for he realised it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed Jesus over. The chief priests, however, had incited the crowd to demand that he should release Barabbas for them instead. Then Pilate spoke again “But in that case, what am I to do with the man you call king of the Jews?” They shouted back “Crucify him!” Pilate asked them, “Why? What harm has he done?” But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!” So Pilate, anxious to placate the crowd, released Barabbas for them and, having ordered Jesus to be scourged, handed him over to be crucified. The soldiers led him away to the inner part of the palace, that is, the Praetorium, and called the whole cohort together. They dressed him up in purple, twisted some thorns into a crown and put it on him. And they began saluting him, “Hail, king of the Jews!” They struck his head with a reed and spat on him; and they went down on their knees to do him homage. And when they had finished making fun of him, they took off the purple and dressed him in his own clothes. They enlisted a passer-by, Simon of Cyrene, father of Alexander and Rufus, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross. They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha, which means the place of the skull. They offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he refused it. Then they crucified him, and shared out his clothing, casting lots to decide what each should get. It was the third hour when they crucified him. The inscription giving the charge against him read: ‘The King of the Jews.’ And they crucified two robbers with him, one on his right and one on his left. The passers-by jeered at him; they shook their heads and said, “Aha! So you would destroy the Temple and rebuild it in three days! Then save yourself: come down from the cross!” The chief priests and the scribes mocked him among themselves in the same way. They said, “He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the king of Israel, come down from the cross

now, for us to see it and believe". Even those who were crucified with him taunted him. When the sixth hour came there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" which means, 'My God, my God, why have you deserted me?' When some of those who stood by heard this, they said "Listen, he is calling on Elijah". Someone ran and soaked a sponge in vinegar and, putting it on a reed, gave it him to drink, saying: "Wait and see if Elijah will come to take him down". But Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last.

And the veil of the Temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The centurion, who was standing in front of him, had seen how he had died, and he said, "In truth this man was a son of God."

Possible questions for your small group

- You might like to imagine that you are one of the people in the story of Jesus' Passion. How do the events appear from your point of view? What do you see, hear, feel?
- Jesus was betrayed by one of his own. Have you ever experienced betrayal? What or who helped your healing? If you have betrayed someone, what could you do about it?
- Christ's trust in his Father and his faithful obedience, even to the point of death, shows us the way to life everlasting. When has your trust in God and faithfulness to him, led you to peace, healing or a more abundant life?
- What does it mean to you to be loved so deeply by God?

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The Diocesan Formation Team.

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